



Klamath Network Featured Creature

April 2006

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The rufous hummingbird is a small migratory member of the Family Trochilidae. Rufous hummingbirds average 7- 9 cm in length with a wingspan of 11 cm. They weigh only a few grams or a little more than a penny. A rusty coloration is common in males and females. Males have an iridescent red throat with orange coloration on the back, body and tail. Males have pointy black tips at the end of the tail. Females have a white throat with a green back and head. The tails of female birds are orange, green and black with rounded white tips. These birds do not sing. Their call is a buzzing sound with sharp chirps.

Behavior:

During the day, birds mostly perch and stand guard over their favorite flower patch. They are extremely territorial at all times of the year, and will aggressively attempt to drive away all other hummingbirds, including much larger species. At night they can enter a state of torpor where rates of metabolism and breathing are reduced and the body temperature cools. In this state, the birds only lose 1% of their body weight overnight.

Feeding:

Rufous hummingbirds feed on flower nectar and some insects such as gnats, midges and whiteflies. They must consume five times their body weight each day to survive. They feed often to gain the energy necessary for 53 wing beats per second during normal flight. These birds seem to know exactly how many flowers they need to forage for the right amount of food and protect that size territory.

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

Rufous hummingbirds are likely a common species in the lower elevations throughout the Network. They arrive at their breeding areas between March and May.



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Habitat:

During the breeding season, rufous hummingbirds are found in grasslands, meadows and closed-canopy forests. In the winter they are found in scrub, thickets and open-canopy forests. They are also very common at backyard feeders.

Distribution:

The species has the northernmost range of any hummingbird. It is common throughout the West Coast of North America from Alaska to Mexico. They breed in the Pacific Northwest and spend winters in Mexico. Individuals travel over 1,500 km during their migration.

Status:

While not endangered, this important pollinator species is on the Audubon Watchlist. It has been declining over most of its range. The Breeding Bird Survey has documented a 2.7% average annual decline from 1966 to 2001. This species is spending more winters in North America with increased sightings during the Christmas Bird Count.

Additional Information:

For more information on *Selasphorus rufus* visit Audubon:

<http://audubon2.org/webapp/watchlist/viewSpecies.jsp?id=179>